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SENATE UNIT ASKS MORE ATOM SUBS

Cites Growing Soviet Fleet
and Challenges McNamara
Plan to Halt Expansion

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The Senate Preparedness Subcommittee recommended strongly today a continuing expansion and improvement of the nation's nuclear submarine fleet to meet the "serious challenge" posed by the growing number of Soviet nuclear submarines.

In a report on a year-long investigation of the submarine program, the subcommittee—the investigating arm of the Senate Armed Services Committee—questioned whether the United States, if it followed present policies, would maintain qualitative superiority over the Soviet Union in nuclear submarines.

350 Soviet Submarines

"The U.S.S.R. is giving major emphasis to qualitative improvement of its submarine fleet and brings into question the validity of our assumption that the United States is, or will be, qualitatively superior," the subcommittee said in an eight-page report.

The subcommittee particularly challenged a decision made last February by former Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara to stop expansion of the nation's nuclear submarine fleet after 1970.

Under Mr. McNamara's plan, the United States in the mid-1970's would have a fleet of 69 nuclear attack submarines, 36 diesel-powered submarines, of which 24 were built immediately after World War II,

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and 41 Polaris missile submarines.

In contrast, the Soviet Union has more than 350 submarines, both conventionally and nuclear powered, and in recent years has expanded its shipyards for an accelerated program for construction of improved nuclear submarines.

The rationale behind Mr. McNamara's decision, opposed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, was that the Soviet numerical superiority in submarines would be offset by the qualitative superiority of the American submarines.

It was this premise that was questioned by the subcommittee which suggested that the Soviet Union, after some initial technical difficulties, was now turning out nuclear submarines that challenged the past qualitative superiority of American submarines.

Mr. McNamara's decision, it said, was "based upon intelligence estimates of Soviet nuclear attack submarine performance characteristics which were erroneously too low and which have since been revised upward on two occasions."

Building Program Urged

The subcommittee recommended, therefore, that the United States continue building nuclear submarines after 1970.

It also urged that there be no change in the Administration's decision last July to proceed with a new high-speed nuclear submarine and that the Navy be permitted to proceed with development of a quiet-running, electric-drive nuclear submarine, a project held up by the Defense Department last May.

The report was the latest in a series by House and Senate committees and the Joint Congressional Atomic Energy Committee warning of the Soviet buildup in nuclear submarines.

In a statement accompanying the report, Senator John Stennis, Democratic of Mississippi, the subcommittee chairman, said that he had been informed recently by the Navy "that 'tentative approval' had been given by the Defense Department to continue the production of nuclear submarines."

The subcommittee report was made public as the Senate prepared to open debate, probably tomorrow, on a \$71.3-billion defense appropriations bill.

While the bill is some \$5-billion less than the amount requested by the Administration, the report reflected the growing pressures in Congress to expand the nation's strategic forces to offset Soviet buildups in nuclear submarines and intercontinental missiles.

Cooper Plans Appeal

Against these pressures a minority in Congress in arguing, thus far vainly, for a leveling off in strategic forces to avert what is feared will be another round in the nuclear arms race.

In the course of the Senate debate, Senator John Sherman Cooper, Republican of Kentucky, plans to make one last effort to postpone deployment of the Sentinel missile defense system.

With the approval of the majority leader, Mike Mansfield, Mr. Cooper proposes to call the Senate into an unusual closed-door executive session.

He will discuss classified intelligence information that he thinks demonstrates that neither Communist China nor the Soviet Union poses as great a missile threat as postulated by the Administration in ordering a go-ahead in deployment of the "light" Sentinel system.

One piece of intelligence information obtained by Senator Cooper predicted that Communist China would have only four or five intercontinental missiles by 1973-75.